

Research Article

Information Seeking Behaviour of Post Graduate Students and Research Scholars in the Faculty of Theology, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh

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A B S T R A C T

The present research endeavor has been undertaken to discover the information-seeking behavior among research scholars and postgraduate students of the Faculty of Theology, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh. The present study discusses library use, satisfaction related to services and resources, dependence on digital and traditional tools used for the study and research. It also seeks to disclose their motives for visiting to the library, information sources of their choice, resources discovery, perception of electronic resources, and the influence of social media in their behavior of seeking information. A structured questionnaire was distributed to postgraduate students and research scholars of the faculty to find the frequency of library visit; methods of retrieving information; satisfaction level concerning the collections and services; social media usage; challenges while looking for information. Quantitative data analysis was used to make interpretations on these items. The study found that a large number of respondents said that they use text books generally followed by reference books and journals and come to the library every day for research. They mostly prefer traditional means of searching and with direct involvement of the library assistants over digital means. With regards to the library collections, it was rated "fair"; nevertheless, most of them reported satisfaction with the services provided by the library. Social media plays an important role in academic networks; among them, a majority of respondents preferred to use LinkedIn. It was also found that the unavailability of materials and scattered information hinders effective information searching and discovery of the nascent information for study and research.

Keywords: Information Seeking Behaviour, Library Services, Use of Resources, Social Media, Traditional Documents, ICT tools and techniques

Introduction

In the digital age, information is crucial for many aspects of daily living, education, and enjoyment. It is defined as organised data or information that is collected, stored, and disseminated via a variety of platforms, such as electronic media, books, journals, magazines, and the internet. Due to the rapid advancement of technology, which has raised demand across a range of industries, people today predominantly rely on digital devices and the Internet to access and gather information. Information can be shared using a variety of platforms, including search engines, social networking sites, Web 2.0, electronic databases, libraries, institutional archives, and print publications. Social media, smartphone apps, and other media make it possible for information to be shared more widely.

The importance of information becomes clearer when contemplating how it affects long-term progress in societies. Information is therefore a crucial tool in many professional fields, as both individuals and organisations rely on it to complete tasks and advance.¹ Researchers like David Ellis created behavioural models in the early 1980s to explain how people locate, engage with, and process information. As a result, the concept of information-seeking behaviour emerged. The conscious or unconscious steps people take to satisfy their demand for pertinent information are referred to as information-seeking behaviour.^{2,3}

Kuhlthau (1993)^[4] defined information seeking as a user's constructive action to extract meaning from information to increase their knowledge. Understanding user groups, their information sources, and their decision-making processes is a major emphasis of information-seeking research.⁵ The information-seeking process is turned into an educational activity by encouraging students, in particular, to actively participate in drawing well-informed conclusions from a variety of data sources.⁶

The concept of information sharing has also been thoroughly researched in the field of information behavior. According to Le (2022),⁷ this entails the sharing of information between people or organizations using a variety of media platforms. Information sharing is one intellectual activity that has been recognized to be crucial to communication and the dissemination of knowledge. Savolainen (2017)⁸ asserts that words like supply, provision, and distribution are frequently employed to characterize the transfer of ideas, opinions, and resources from one individual to another.

The present study is based on the information-seeking behavior of postgraduate students and research scholars from the Faculty of Theology, Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), on identifying the reasons for library visits, major sources of information, methods used to locate the documents, levels of satisfaction with the library in

its collections and services, issues of social media and electronics use, and the problems to be faced during the process. It also aims to offer insight into how social networking and digital tools influence academic research and information retrieval.

Review of Related Literature

The reviewed studies highlight various aspects of information-seeking behaviour and its influencing factors among university students and academic professionals across different contexts. Kim (2024)⁹ conducted a study using a questionnaire and underscored the role of purpose and social media in fostering information sharing. Kim found a negative correlation between information avoidance and search purpose, and Sivakumar et al. (2023)¹⁰ showed that social media positively affects students' knowledge sharing. Using an online survey and structural equation modelling, Muliadi et al. (2022)¹¹ emphasise the importance of social capital in building trust, which enhances information sharing on social platforms. Khanum and Bashir (2021)¹² address the information competencies of Urdu literature students by using a quantitative survey, convenience sampling, and a self-designed questionnaire, revealing their limited experience with scholarly resources and suggesting increased engagement with research publications. Ng et al. (2020)¹³ explore the impact of online information susceptibility on students' institutional choices, noting the influence of social norms. Amrullah et al. (2019)¹⁴ delve into information-seeking on religious tolerance, highlighting social media's role and obstacles such as misinformation. Sellan, 2018; Chisa, 2017^{15,16} examine theological faculty and theologians' strategies for seeking information, revealing a preference for both personal collections and traditional sources in South African theological schools. Savolainen (2016)¹⁷ provides a broader conceptual analysis of integrated information behaviour models, demonstrating conceptual growth through the synthesis of lower-level constructs into higher abstractions. Together, these studies offer a rich understanding of information-seeking behaviour influenced by purpose, social context, competencies, and access to various information resources.

Objectives of the study

The main goal of this study is to offer an in-depth understanding of using and seeking the information from the library by postgraduate students and research scholars in the Faculty of Theology, AMU, Aligarh. The research focuses on the following objectives:

- To explore information-seeking behaviour and challenges of PG and RS of the faculty, AMU, Aligarh
- To examine satisfaction of users with library resources and services
- To study the role of e-resources and social media in education and research

- To identify the major sources of information for study, examination, and research work.

Methodology

Methodology refers to a systematic framework or set of principles used to guide research, analysis, or problem-solving within a specific discipline. It encompasses the methods, techniques, and procedures employed to collect and analyze data, ensuring a structured approach. This research utilizes a questionnaire-based method to collect quantitative data, aiming to provide a detailed understanding of students' information-seeking behaviors. The study surveyed 95 students, including both postgraduate students and research scholars. We used a structured questionnaire to gather data on various aspects such as the frequency of information-seeking, preferred sources of information, tools used, and overall satisfaction with the information retrieval process.

Data Analysis & Interpretation

The data in Table 1 collected by the investigator were organized and tabulated by using statistical measures such as tables, percentages, and graphs. A total of 95 questionnaires were distributed among research scholars and postgraduates in the Faculty of Theology, AMU, Aligarh. All the surveyed students filled out the questionnaire and returned it to the investigator, and all 95 questionnaires were filled out properly, and the same number of questionnaires (95) were selected for analysis and interpretation by the investigator. The following pages are about the analysis and their interpretation by tables and graphs.

Frequency of Library Visits

Figure 1 shows that 80% of research scholars and postgraduate students engage in daily library visits, with

74% and 84% describing their visits. A minority, 11%, visit more than once a week or sometimes, while no postgraduates reported these rates. Additionally, 16% of postgraduates attend the library weekly, compared to 5% of research scholars. The primary purposes for library visits among research scholars and postgraduates are categorising their motivations into distinct activities such as studying and researching, collecting study materials, reading relevant journals, handling document transactions, and obtaining the latest information.

Library Collection

Figure 2 highlights the appraisal of library collections as regarded by different academic groups, specifically research scholars and postgraduates. The evaluation is graded into five levels: Excellent, Very Good, Good, Fair, and Poor. According to Figure 2, none of the research scholars ranked the collection as excellent, while 4% of postgraduates did so, comprising 2% of the total responses. In the "Very Good" category, 11% of research scholars and none of the postgraduates evaluated the collection as such, resulting in 5% of overall ratings. Similarly, the "Good" category was scored by 11% of research scholars and none of the postgraduates, likewise making up 5% of overall ratings. In contrast, a considerable majority of 73% of respondents ranked the collection as fair, with 53% of research academics and 88% of postgraduates in this category. Finally, the "poor" grade was provided by 26% of research scholars and 8% of postgraduates, amounting to 16% of the total ratings. This distribution reveals a predominant assessment of the library collection as fair among the academic groupings assessed.

Table I. Department-wise distribution of questionnaires

Departments	No. of questionnaires distributed to Research scholars	No. of questionnaires distributed to Post Graduate students	No. of questionnaires received from Research scholars	No. of questionnaires received from Post Graduate Students
Sunni Theology	35	34	35	34
Shia Theology	6	20	6	20

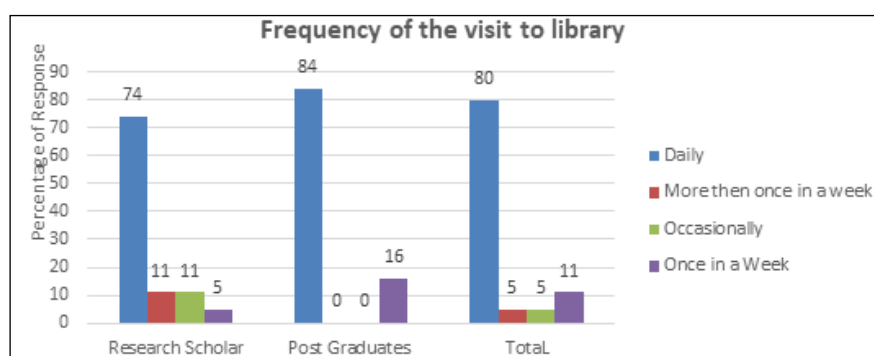


Figure 1. Frequency of Library Visits

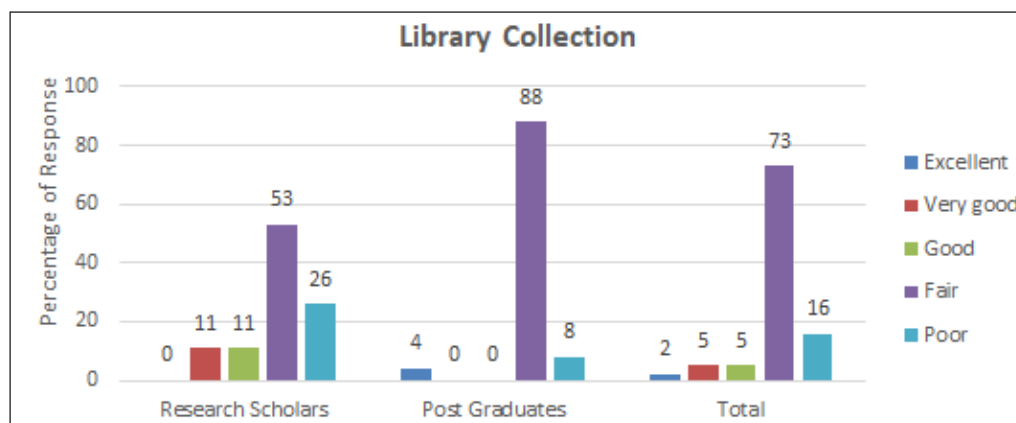


Figure 2. Library Collection

Preferred Method for Searching the Documents

Figure 3 shows an overview of document search strategies performed by research scholars and postgraduates in the library. The data in Table 2 suggests that a large proportion of both research scholars and postgraduates choose to search the shelves alone or seek assistance from library workers, with each approach being adopted by 32% of the total respondents. Consulting the library catalogue is also a regularly used strategy, recommended by 25% of the total participants. In contrast, reviewing internet resources is substantially less favoured, utilised by just 11% of the respondents, with postgraduates exhibiting a particularly low preference for this strategy at just 4%. The utilisation of interlibrary borrowing is modest, accounted for by only 1% of the total respondents, specifically a research researcher. These findings reveal a larger reliance on traditional search methods within the library compared to digital or inter-library resources.

Major Sources for Obtaining Information

Figure 4 shows the ranking of important sources for information, with books being the most important source (100%). Theses and dissertations are the primary choices for Table 5, with 75% occupying this position. Conference proceedings are in fourth place (63.6%), followed by reference sources (50% and 25%) and magazines and newspapers (63.6%). These rankings are based on the data in Table 3. This distribution reflects the main role of books as information sources, followed by other academic materials based on clarity.

Satisfaction with Library Services

The data presented in Table 4 provides information on the level of satisfaction of research scholars and postgraduate students with the library services offered. From the below Figure 5 diagram, it is clear that 5% of research scholars and 0% of postgraduates are highly satisfied, while 68% of research scholars and 56% of postgraduates are satisfied with library services; 26% of research scholars and 36% of

postgraduates are neutral; 0% of research scholars and 8% of postgraduates are dissatisfied; and 0% of research scholars and 0% of postgraduates are highly dissatisfied. Hence, it may be concluded that the majority of the respondents (61%) are satisfied with the library services.

Perception about Seeking Information

Figure 6 indicates that 0% of research scholars and 0% of postgraduates seeking information through electronic resources find it extremely easy, while 26% of research scholars and 40% of postgraduates feel it is very easy, 42% of research scholars and 52% of postgraduates feel it is somewhat easy, 32% of research scholars and 8% of postgraduates feel it is slightly easy, and 0% of research scholars and 0% of postgraduates feel it is not at all easy. Hence, it may be concluded that the majority of the respondents are in favour of the idea that electronic sources have made it somewhat easy to search for and access information.

Use of Social Media for Seeking Information

The data presented in Table 5 provides information about the use of social media by researchers and postgraduate students to seek information. Figure 7 indicates that 5% of research scholars and 4% of postgraduates use social media very frequently, whereas 79% of research scholars and 92% of postgraduates use social media frequently; 16% of research scholars and 4% of postgraduates use social media occasionally; 0% of research scholars and 0% of postgraduates use social media rarely; and 0% of research scholars and 0% of postgraduates use social media never. Hence, it may be concluded that the majority of the respondents use social media frequently.

Preferred Social Networking Site for Information Seeking

Figure 8 indicates that 30% of research scholars and 0% of postgraduates use ResearchGate, whereas 13% of research scholars and 22% of postgraduates use Academia.edu, 57% of research scholars and 78% of postgraduates use LinkedIn,

and 0% of research scholars and 0% of postgraduates use ORCID. Thus, it may be concluded that the majority of the respondents use LinkedIn as the most preferred social networking site.

Table 2.Method of Document Search

Method	Research Scholars	Post graduates	Total
Consult the library catalogue	16 (17%)	28 (29%)	24 (25%)
Search the shelves yourself	28 (29%)	32 (33%)	31 (32%)
Ask the library staff	28 (29%)	32 (33%)	31 (32%)
Check online resources	22 (23%)	4 (4%)	11 (11%)
Inter- library loan	3 (3%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)

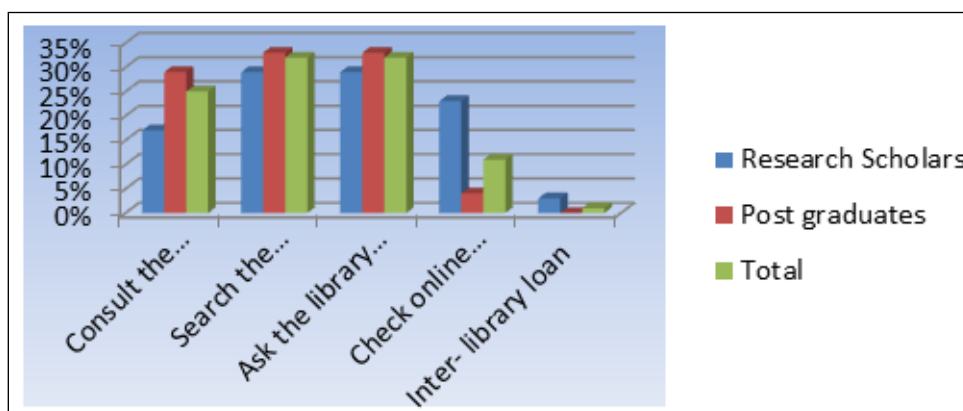


Figure 3.Method of Document Search

Table 3.Document Types

Major Sources	First rank	Second rank	Third rank	Fourth rank	Fifth rank
Books	95 (100%)	0	0	0	0
Thesis/Dissertation	0	13 (13.6%)	2 (2.2%)	9 (9%)	72 (75%)
Conference proceeding	0	22(20.4%)	9(9%)	61(63.6%)	7 (6.8%)
Reference sources	0	46 (50%)	24 (25%)	13 (13.6%)	11 (11.3%)
Journals/ Periodical	0	16(15.9%)	61(63.6%)	13 (13.6%)	7 (6.8%)

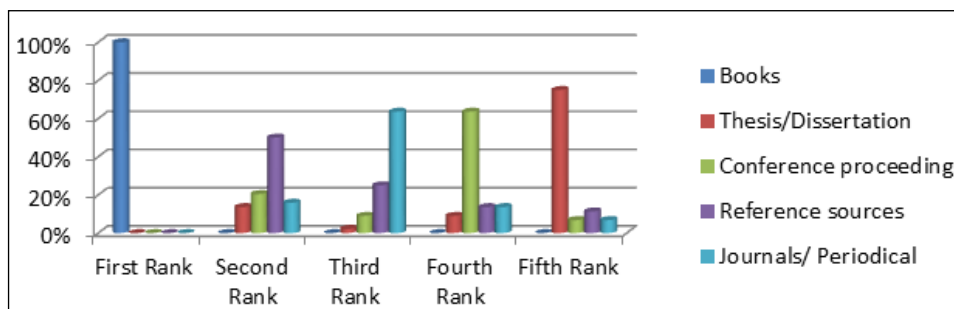


Figure 4.Document Types

Table 3.Document Types

Library Services	Research Scholars	Post Graduates	Total
Highly satisfied	5 (5%)	0 (0%)	2 (2%)
Satisfied	65 (68%)	52 (56%)	58 (61%)
Neutral	25 (26%)	35 (36%)	30 (31%)

Dissatisfied	0 (0%)	8 (8%)	5 (5%)
Highly dissatisfied	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

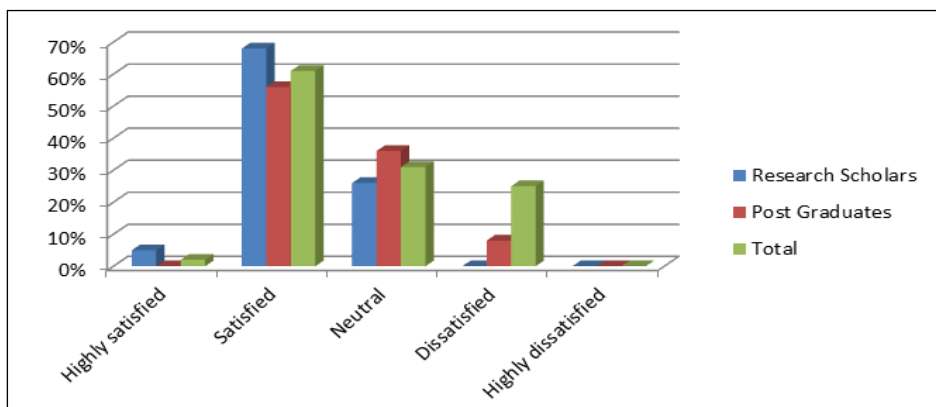


Figure 5.Satisfaction Level with Library Services

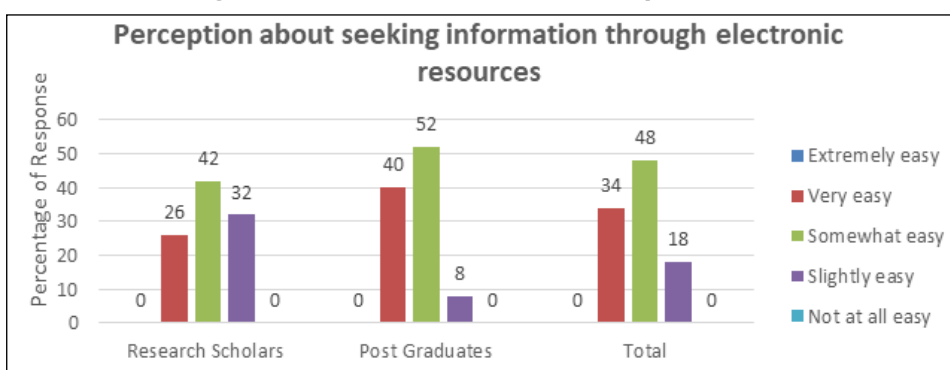


Figure 6.Perception about Seeking Information through e-resources

Table 5.Use of Social Media for Seeking Information

Use	Research Scholars	Post Graduates	Total
Very frequently	5 (5%)	4 (4%)	5 (5%)
Frequently	75 (79%)	88 (92%)	82 (86%)
Occasionally	16 (16%)	4 (4%)	9 (9%)
Rarely	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Never	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

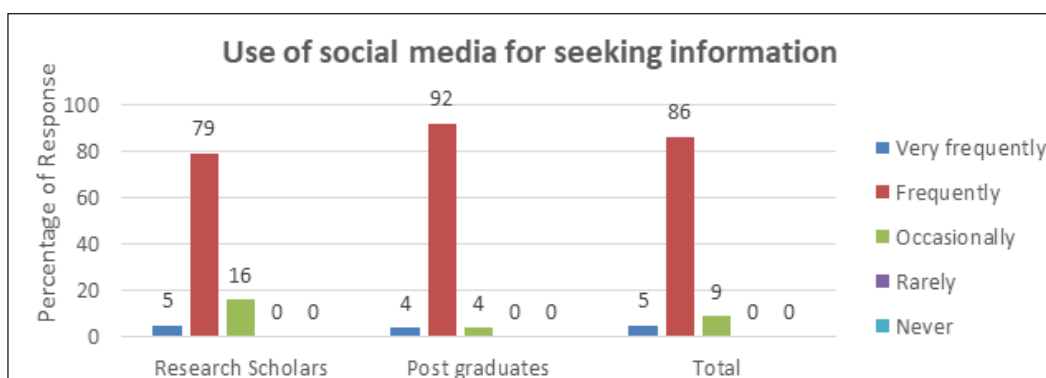


Figure 7.Use of Social Media for Seeking Information

Challenges faced during Information Seeking

The data presented in Table 6 provides insight into the various challenges encountered by research scholars and postgraduate students during the information-seeking process. Figure 9 indicates that a significant proportion of both groups, 48% of research scholars and 44% of postgraduates, reported that the required materials were not available, making this the most prevalent issue, affecting 46% of the total respondents. Additionally, 19% of the respondents indicated that information is scattered across too many sources, with research scholars experiencing this problem more acutely (34%) compared to post-

graduates (11%). The unavailability of the latest information sources was also a notable concern, particularly among postgraduates, where 44% highlighted this issue, in contrast to only 14% of research scholars. Interestingly, none of the respondents identified information overload as a problem. Furthermore, a small percentage (1.2%) indicated that a lack of time for searching was a challenge, with only one research scholar raising this concern. Overall, the data underscores the need for improved access to required and up-to-date information sources while addressing the challenges of fragmented information for both research scholars and postgraduates.

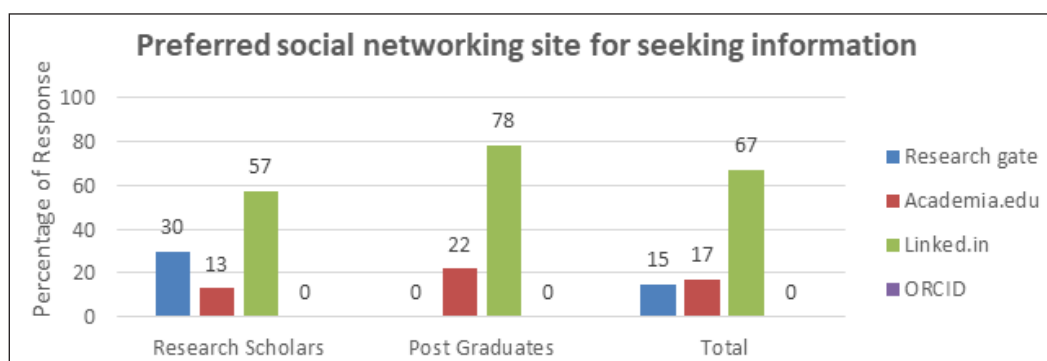


Figure 8. Preferred Social Networking Site

Table 6. Challenges Faced during Information Seeking

Problems	Research Scholars	Post Graduates	Total
Required material is not available	46 (48%)	42 (44%)	44 (46%)
Information is scattered in too many sources	33 (34%)	11 (11%)	18 (19%)
Latest information sources are not available	14 (14%)	42 (44%)	33 (34%)
Information explosion or too much information	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Lack of time for searching	3 (3%)	0 (0%)	2 (1.2%)

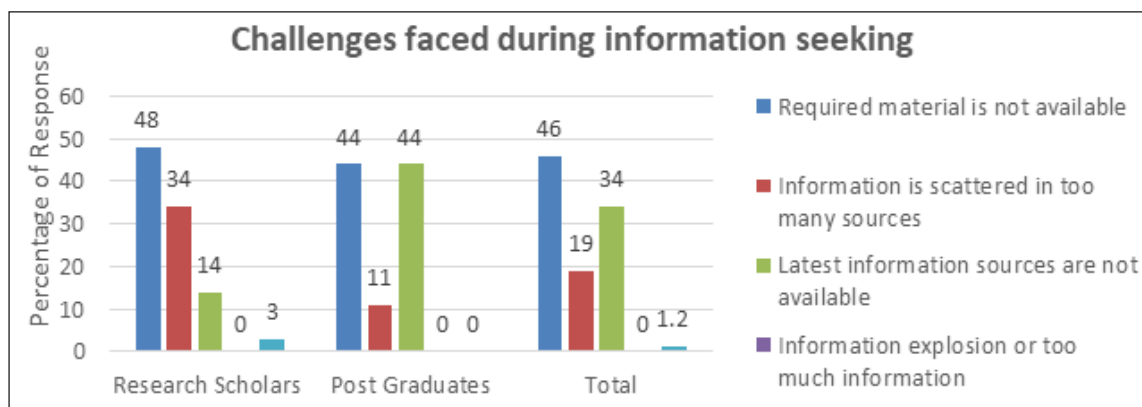


Figure 9. Challenges Faced during Information Seeking

Findings

The key findings of this study are presented in an organised format which has been derived from the survey data received from the respondents and give an idea about their preferences, trends, and difficulties while seeking information from the library. A careful scrutiny of the responses revealed several important aspects that come out in relation to the objectives of the study. Besides highlighting the lacunae, the study also attempts to present a view on the information needs and information-seeking behaviour of the participants, and the major findings of the study are as under:

- **Main Sources of Information:** The study found that the books consistently ranked as the top choice by students. Other materials, such as theses, dissertations, conference proceedings, reference works, and journals, were used less frequently.
- **Library collection:** Opinions on the library's collection varied; while some participants rated it as very good or good, the majority rated it as fair, and a smaller portion expressed dissatisfaction.
- **Document search techniques:** To find documents, some respondents used manual techniques or asked library employees for help. A smaller percentage of participants favoured using online resources; however, consulting the library catalogue was another popular approach. The low usage of interlibrary borrowing suggests a dependence on conventional library search techniques.
- **Satisfaction with library services:** Most respondents expressed satisfaction with library services, although some were neutral. Only a few participants were dissatisfied.
- **Use of social networking sites:** Social networking sites were frequently used for academic purposes by most respondents, while a smaller group reported occasional use. None of the respondents indicated rare or no use.
- **Favourite Social Networking Sites:** ResearchGate and Academia.edu are also used, albeit less frequently, for obtaining and disseminating academic knowledge, but LinkedIn has become a popular platform.
- **Ease of Accessing Electronic Material:** In all, participants said that it was not too difficult to find electronic materials. None reported the process was very easy, although several thought it was quite easy.
- **Challenges in information search:** The most frequently mentioned challenge was the unavailability of required materials in the library. Other issues included scattered information, outdated sources, and the absence of the latest information. Some respondents mentioned a lack of time when searching for information.

Conclusion

The study provides insightful findings regarding the preferences, practices, and challenges in accessing and utilizing information resources of PG and Research Scholars. The research highlights the critical role libraries play in academic life, while also underscoring areas for improvement to better meet the evolving needs of users. The paper indicates different aspects related to the preferred habits, practices, and various challenges with regard to issues of access and use of information resources. This study has, at the same time, clearly visualized the important role libraries perform in academic life and has hinted toward areas needing improvement so that the needs of its growing users may be met effectively. The highest percentage of respondents uses the library on a regular basis, and books are pointed out as the most used source of information. The respondents still prefer the traditional methods such as going directly to the library personnel and physical searches rather than digital tools, indicating the conventional method of approach in information retrieval. Although most users reported being satisfied with the services offered by the library, the collection itself was ranked predominantly "fair," thus requiring development in terms of range and quality. It can go a long way in improving if library collections, which are being enhanced to include a greater variety of updated resources, especially electronic materials, are supported by increased user education and training in digital tools and advanced searching. Strengthening digital and traditional methods to be offered as a hybrid approach would not only meet diverse user preferences but also foster the use of social media and academic networking platforms to enrich research opportunities and scholarly collaboration. The findings of this study provide an in-depth overview of the information-seeking behavior and needs of theology scholars and postgraduate students. Library services are in a strategic position whereby challenges are highlighted, and the harnessing of opportunities are availed upon for better service provision. It may not only be effective, but also provide better service to the academic and research endeavours of the user communities.

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